

Subject: ANS Purchase of Manhattan Island  
medal--struck or cast?

Sharpe, Henry D.  
[Providence, RI]

1926

HENRY D. SHARPE, #  
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PROVIDENCE, R. I.

June 1-26

Mr. Howland Wood. Secy  
Amer. Numismatic Society  
New York

My dear Howland.

The "Purchase of Manhattan Island" Medal

has duly arrived, and its design greatly interests me.

Am I right in thinking that the medal is cast and  
not struck? It seems to me that a medal, to be  
made right, should be struck, and not cast.

History requires no very fine. I find more  
or less ignorance on the subject. Generally speaking  
has it been the custom of great medal makers to

strike their medals or to cast them. Did  
Benvenuto Cellini follow either one practice; or both, and  
if so, to what degree of each.

Any information you can give me as to the  
practice of the best medalists, <sup>into</sup> or the limitations of  
the art, would be appreciated.

It is a long time since I had the pleasure  
of seeing you.

If I am again in Providence, you must visit  
the new Museum Building at the School of Design  
it is a beautiful structure

Cordially yours / Henry D. Thayer



June 3rd, 1926

Henry D. Sharpe, Esq.  
Box 1383  
Providence, R.I.

Dear Mr. Sharpe:

I was very glad to receive your letter, and trust I shall run across you somewhere some time, but if I remember rightly, the last time that I saw you was on a train from New York to Boston - and before then, on Lake Lemond!

The Purchase of Manhattan Island medal is struck and not cast. You may have been misled because the finish, as with most modern medals, is done by a sandblast after striking. This puts on a somewhat rough surface. Nearly every modern medal is struck - the exceptions being very large medals, medals where but very few copies are made, and sometimes through the whim of the artist or publisher.

The first medals - that is, in the time of the Renaissance, were cast, as the stamping press was not then sufficiently developed, and also the casting process was more under the supervision of the artist. If I remember correctly, medals were struck by machinery about 1500, but it was not until some time in the seventeenth century that it became a common practice. A struck medal involves, or did involve in those days, a different procedure as it necessitated the direct cutting into the die, while cast medals today could be made by modelling in wax. Of course, coins have always been struck. Naturally, there are a few exceptions.

Cellini made several coin designs, being an "all-round man", probably cut the actual dies. As far as I know, his medals were all cast.

In recent years, the whole practice of medal-making has been revolutionized. Formerly, every medallist had to be a die engraver, and many technically able men were but mediocre artists. Today, hardly a medal maker can cut a die. Nowadays, anybody who can model take a "fling" at making medals as all one has to do is to model in low relief and have his design put on a reducing machine, and the die is cut direct from the large size medal by a mechanical process. This is worked both ways. Superior artists who could not otherwise cut dies have been able to reproduce excellent medals. Also, anyone who thinks he can model, can do likewise.



Henry D. Sharpe, Esq.

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I have heard much of the new Museum building of the School of Design. I always visit the School when in Providence, not only because I admire and enjoy it, but I have a sentiment concerning it, as I went there on Sunday mornings and many evenings for a number of years.

Very truly yours,

Curator